AN

APPEAL TO THE YOUNG,

ON THE

IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION.

BY JOHN FOSTER,

AUTHOR OF ESSAYS ON DECISION OF CHARACTER,
&c., &c.

PUBLISHED BY THE

AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

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Amid the variety of excellent religious books for the young, few have been particularly addressed to the higher and educated classes in society. The following pages are from the pen of one of the most powerful writers of the age, and will be found admirably adapted to intelligent and educated young persons who have neglected the great subject of their salvation. By placing this little work in their hands, the Christian may be the means, under God, of making them "wise unto salvation."

AN APPEAL TO THE YOUNG.

CHAPTER I.

Dear Young Friend,

Will you be persuaded, *is* it possible to induce you to make a short effort with your mind to constrain it to serious reflection? Would you have me, or not, to regard you as capable of thinking and judging, as in possession of a share of good sense, and as admitting that there really may be a just call for its exercise, even at your age? You are not willing to be accounted the reverse of this. Well, then, prove that you can think, and that you can perceive when there is a subject before you which has peculiar *claims* that you should think. And is there any thing which can urge a more peremptory claim than the questions, What manner of being it is that you possess, to what end you possess it, and how it should be occupied in order to the attainment of that end? Is your own nature a thing of such little account with you, that you are quite satisfied with the mere fact of

its being an existence, and that you have no doubt whether you may give away all its faculties, without care or accountableness, to whatever pleases them and invites them into action? Does every consciousness you feel of what there is in that nature, agree to your living as a gay bird of the spring; as a creature made for the play and revel of mere life and sensation: or, at most, fitted for some little schemes of transient interest, confined to a span of existence, and liable to be broken up and given to the winds at any hour? Is this all you find in the endowments of your nature; is this the amount of its capabilities and dignity? No, you would say; you believe that you possess, for you have been taught that all of us do, a spirit of noble quality and important destination. Do you indeed believe any such thing? What, while I see the whole vigor of your being, animal and mental, at some times dissipated in levity, spirited off in effusions of mirth, or at other times consumed in earnest protracted assiduity to accomplish some contrivance for personal display, some little feat of competition, or some scheme (a grand one, you think) of creating for yourself a happiness for a few years from materials which every day must diminish, and any day may annihilate? Is it impossible to you, or do

you not think it worth while to reflect whether so living be consistent with so believing? Does it never strike you as a thing to wonder at, that there can be a creature so strangely formed as to admit these things to coalesce, and that you happen to be that creature? Or do you escape all sense of inconsistency and shame through mere thoughtlessness, which prevents your being reminded of that truth which you say you believe?

Mere thoughtlessness! And how is *that* possible? How is it possible to believe what you affirm that you do, and not often feel a solemn influence coming over your mind, and banishing, for at least a little while, all trifling moods and interests? Assured that you are, as to the most essential property of your nature, a spiritual and immortal being, think, account to yourself how it *can* be that such a conviction, fixed and abiding within you, should abide there alone disconnected from all the activity of your ideas and feelings, having, so to speak, nothing to do there; while, in all reason, it ought to be combined there with many most important ideas with which it has an inseparable relation, and which it ought to keep there in active force.

For, consider what you are admitting when you say you believe you are such a being. You

are admitting that you stand in a solemn relation to the Almighty; that your present state of existence is but a brief introduction to another; that your body is but a frame accommodated to retain your superior and more essential being for a short period in this world; that its interests, therefore, and all interests which respect this world exclusively, are infinitely insignificant in comparison with those of the spirit; that you are every moment in progress toward the experience of a happiness or misery of incalculable magnitude; and that this short and uncertain life is the season for maturing the dispositions and habits to a state which will consign you to one or the other, if the declarations of God be true. Can you attempt to deny, or pretend to doubt, that all this is included in the fact of your possessing a rational spirit, destined to endless existence, and most justly required to obey the commands of your Creator? But, if this be true, you cannot exercise your judgment, and listen to your conscience for one hour, without plainly seeing what is your highest interest and most imperious duty. Nothing in the world, nothing in all truth, can press upon you with mightier evidence than that your grand business in life is the care of the soul that shall live for ever. Confess to your reason

and conscience that the case is so, and that any assertion to the contrary would instantly strike you as false and foolish.

You do confess it. But, what then should be thought of you; what should you think of yourself, if you will then act as if the very contrary were the truth? Suppose that (in such a spontaneous escape of thoughts in words as sometimes happens to a person musing in the security of solitude) the prevailing disposition of your mind were to utter itself involuntarily and audibly, and in expressions like these? "My supreme concern is as clear to my view as the sun; there is no denying it; there is no question about it; it is, to apply myself earnestly to secure the welfare, here and hereafter, of my immortal spirit; but I feel no such care; I dislike and evade all admonitions which would enforce it on me; I yield myself to this disposition without restraint, or remorse, or fear, for the present, and shall do so—I do not know, nor much care, how long." Supposing this uttered in an almost unconscious passing of your mind into your voice, would you not be awaked and startled into recollection at sounds of such import, and be almost surprised into the question, "Who was saying that? Was it I? How strangely it would have sounded if any one had been within

hearing." If any one had been within hearing! And could you forget that there is One who perfectly knows that internal disposition of which expressions like these might be the genuine utterance?

CHAPTER II.

While you are intent on being happy, surely it should be one thing regarded as indispensable to your being truly so, that you can approve yourself; that, whatever imperfections there are for you to condemn and regret, you yet *can* feel a deliberate complacency, a complacency of reflection and conscience in the prevailing habit and purpose of your mind. What is it worth that a variety of outward things should please you, if you are haunted with a sense that your own internal condition, the condition of your very self, is something to grieve you? Now I wish it were possible to induce you to turn upon yourself one resolute, patient, impartial inspection. Look with the intentness with which you

would gaze on an emblematical picture, in whose signs you could believe your destiny to be figured out; look on the being, formed for an endless futurity, but engrossed by the interests of a day; appointed, after a short term, to pass into another world, but repelling all thoughts and monitions of it; capable of an elevated and perpetual felicity, but sunk and expended in transient pleasures and precarious hopes; invited to communion with the Father of spirits, but turning away with indifference or aversion to seek all that it wants, for affection and assistance, in the intercourse of associates who are equally careless of his favor; and summoned to adopt a wise and constant discipline to make sure of its true welfare in time and eternity, but surrendering the formation of its character, and the direction of its course, to whatever may happen to obtain the ascendency, to casual impressions, ill-chosen friends, or the prevailing spirit and habits of the world. Behold this spectacle as being yourself, your very self. Do you turn from the sight, and say you do not *like* to look at it? What, then you confess that amidst all the youthful vivacity in which you spring to catch the passing pleasures, and call them happiness, one primary requisite to true happiness is wanting. You cannot be happy

while you dare not be sometimes still and abstracted from the stir, lest you should hear a complaining and accusing voice from within, telling you there is something fatally wrong *there*.

You are reluctant to give any attention to religion. Why should you, you think, have the brightness of your early season overcast with the gloom of such a subject? preferring, in effect, that this shade, if it *must* come some time, should wait to bring additional darkness over a period when the sunshine of youth will be past, and life be declining into that season which you never think of but as of itself a dreary one. How cruel the gay youth can resolve to be to the aged person that he expects to become! I will repel, he practically says, all invasion of a grave subject from this my season of animation and delight, at the cost of having it to come, as a melancholy cloud, over a time when I shall, by the course of nature, have outlived the best part of my life. So that my sense of energy and enjoyment be kept clear, never mind what I may be accumulating to bring sadness on my spirit in that stage where I shall need every consolation. Surely the consciousness of acting on such a plan, should itself be enough to damp the gayest of your vivacities.

You are unwilling to yield to the claims of religion. But will you not take the trouble to consider what religion is, and in what manner it concerns you? It is not a thing which your Creator imposes on you by a mere arbitrary appointment; as if he would exact, simply in assertion of his supremacy, and in requirement of homage from his creature, something which is in itself foreign to the necessities of your nature. By its intrinsic quality it so corresponds to your nature, that the possession of it is vital, and its rejection mortal, to your felicity, even independently of its being made obligatory by the positive injunction of the Almighty. From the spiritual principle of your soul, there is an absolute necessity that it be raised into complacent communication with its Divine Original; it is constituted to need this communication, now and for ever; and if it be not so exalted, it is degrad ed and prostrated to objects which cannot, by their very nature, adequately meet, and fill, and bless, its faculties: to be elevated to this communication, is religion. You do not, I presume, wish that your spirit were a being destined to final extinction a few years hence; but would you have it be immortal, and yet estranged from what must naturally concern it *as* immortal? If really immortal, it is under a plain necessity

of its nature to give a devoted regard to its interests of hereafter—of eternity: to do so, is religion. Again, your soul is tainted with corruption; it is infected with sin; you are sometimes conscious that it is; and this is a malady which may cling to it, and inhere in it, after all bodily diseases have ceased in death. But then there is the plainest necessity that some grand operation be effected in it to remove this fatal disorder; that its condition be renovated and purified; that the action of its powers be determined to the right ends; that its guilt be pardoned; that, in one word, it be redeemed: now this great process in the soul is religion. Thus you may see that there can be no grosser misapprehension than that which has sometimes prompted the impious wish, that God had not *made* religion necessary by enjoying it; as if, but for this extrinsic necessity, this necessity of mere obligation to his authority, religion might have been neglected, and the neglecter have fared never the worse.

CHAPTER III.

But you plead, that whatever may be your conviction and ought to be your feeling, you cannot help regarding religion as an austere and gloomy concern; that you have at times wished the case were otherwise; but so it is that the subject still presents the same repulsive aspect whenever it comes by unpleasant surprise, or in the returns of public or private religious instruction, on your attention. You will take every precaution to avoid being left alone with a person, however estimable and kind, from whom you are apprehensive of receiving any admonition respecting it. Perhaps even the sight of a book, familiarly known to be an earnest inculcation of it, is like glancing at the picture of a skeleton. The subject might become quite a grievance of your life—even this subject which represents to you how to be happy for ever—did not your health, your elastic spirits, your companions, your diversions, defend you so well against its frequent or prolonged annoyance But sometimes, perhaps, an interval does occur when it visits you in such a character of authority, that your resistance fails for a short time,

you are taken at an advantage and compelled to hear something of its declarations, claims, and remonstrances. And then you murmur and say, "A cruel alternative! to yield such submission, or incur such consequences. Is it not hard that I should be required to surrender all the delights which are the privilege of my age, to repress my vivacity, to forsake my gay society, abandon my amusements, to inflict self-denial on my inclinations at every turn; to deplore all that I am, and all that I have been; to force my attention and affections away from this interesting world around me, toward another and unseen world of which I know nothing; to toil through severe and never-ceasing exercises, called discipline; to exhaust my spirits in solemn reflection; to live in terror lest every thing I do or enjoy should be sin; to renounce and put myself in conflict with the prevailing habits of society; to be marked as an over-righteous or melancholy mortal; to look through a darkened medium at every thing in life, and to go through the world thinking of every step as a progress toward the grave?"

Now, even were it admitted that all this is a true representation of religion, that all this *is* its requirement, the friend who is urging it upon you might still maintain his argument. The question, he would say, what cost we should be

willing to bear in a process, is to be determined, if wisdom be the judge, by an estimate of the result. The greatest temporary evil would be a mild condition of the attainment of an eternal good. If religion actually *did* require all this, but in return assured you of being safe and happy for ever, what would your high endowment of reason be worth, in practical application, if you would not resolve on the endurance of such an introduction rather than lose such a sequel?

But you well know that such a representation, unqualified, is no just account of the demands of religion. And beware of allowing yourself in the disingenuousness of exaggerating the hardship, in order to extenuate to your conscience, or to vindicate against your friendly admonisher, your neglect of the duty.

At the same time it is true, and must be unequivocally avowed, that religion, effectually prosecuted, does involve great labors, a discipline often severe, and therefore many painful experiences. It must include much that is mortifying to natural inclinations. How should it be otherwise with a being of a corrupt nature, who is to be trained and prepared, and that while under the incessant influences of a corrupt world, for a final state of holiness and feli-

city? If the natural condition of the mind be uncongenial with what is divine and heavenly, its affections unattempered to live and delight in that element which is the vitality of the happiness of the beings whom, alone and exclusively, the revelation from God, and even your own reason, authorize you to conceive of as happy in a superior state—if there be this alienation and unfitness, (and what is the aversion to religion but the proof of it? or rather, it *is* the thing itself,)—if the case be so, then the soul is in a condition so dreadfully wrong, that it is not strange the agency for transforming it should inflict pain in the salutary process. That it should work with some expedients of bitterness, keenness, and fire, is quite in analogy with the operations necessary for subduing the extreme maladies of an inferior order. Perhaps you will say, that as the Divine power, in the time and in the person of our Lord, annihilated the worst diseases of the body by a single act, making the subject perfectly well in an instant, and without pain; so the Almighty could instantaneously set the moral nature right, causing the spirit to rise up suddenly in the delightful consciousness that not a particle of evil remains, blessed with a triumph over the disastrous fall, and assuming a ground still higher than that which our first

progenitor lost. No doubt he could; but since he has not willed such an economy, the question comes to you, whether you can deliberately judge it better to carry forward a corrupt nature uncorrected, untransformed, unreclaimed to God, into the future state where it must be miserable, than to undergo whatever severity is indispensable in the process of the religion which would prepare you for a happy eternity? Reflect that you are every day practically answering the question. Can it be that you are answering it in the affirmative? Do I really see before me the rational being who in effect avows I cannot, will not, submit to such a discipline, though in refusing it and resisting it I renounce an infinite and eternal good, and consign myself to perdition?

Religion, it is acknowledged, brings its pains, just because it comes from heaven to maintain a deadly conflict in the soul, with principles and dispositions which are rebellious against heaven and destructive to the soul itself. Nothing can be more thoughtless or unknowing than the strain in which some have indulged in the recommendation of it as if it were all facility and enjoyment. You have possibly heard or read graceful periods of descant on the subject, representing to young people, especially, that *their*

lively perception of the good and the fair, *their* generous sentiments, *their* uncontaminated affections, are so much in unison with the spirit of piety, that it is a matter of the utmost ease for them, for such as you, to enter on the happiness of the religious life. Some little obstruction surmounted, one light spring made, and you regain the walks of Eden. Did you believe it? If you did, what unaccountable caprice, what pure wantonness of perversity could it be that withheld you? Or, if you were induced to make some short attempt in the way of experiment, did you not wonder how it should happen, by a peculiar untowardness in your case, that these youthful qualities, so congenial with piety, and so easy to be resolved into it, did nevertheless prove obstinately repugnant to the union? Did you not think, Why, then, this aversion to read the Bible, or to retire for serious meditation and devotional exercise, or to any act of duty to be done simply in obedience to God? But the declamation which you had heard was idle rhetoric or wretched ignorance.

It must be acknowledged, also, that much worthier teachers have, from a better cause, sometimes committed an error in underrating, or keeping nearly out of view, the austerer characteristics of religion, when inculcating it on youth.

In their benevolent zeal to persuade, they were desirous of presenting a picture wholly attractive. And perhaps religion was become so decidedly their own chief happiness, that they could, for the time, forget the pains of the transformation through which it had become so. They have therefore made a representation illuminated nearly all over with delightful images. It is better that you should see the whole truth, and clearly understand that the agent which, in a capacity like that of a tutelary priest, takes in charge a perverted, sinful, tempted being, to be humbled and reclaimed, taught many mortifying lessons, disciplined through a series of many corrections, reproved, restrained, and incited, and thus conducted onward, in advancing preparation for the happiness of another world, *must* be the inflicter of many pains during the progress of this beneficent guardianship. And it is not, as your aversion and murmurs would imply, the fault of religion that the case is so, but of that depraved nature which religion is designed and indispensable to redeem.

So much for the darker side. But now, on the other hand, you can surely conceive, as compatible with all this, a great preponderance of happiness in this life. And therefore you ought to take it on your conscience as a re-

proach for criminal want of thought, or of honesty, that you will admit no other notion of religion than that of a gloomy melancholy thing. When you are turning away from it, as a grim and ghostly object, sent to encounter you for no more friendly purpose than to obstruct you, with threatening aspect, at every avenue to the scenes of delight, there ought to arise within your mind a serener image, to condemn you for willfully misjudging its character and the service it has to offer you. For you *can* comprehend that there is attainable, through the efficacy of religion, something far better than all you can hope ever to enjoy under the unhallowed advantage of rejecting it. Try faithfully whether you cannot understand that it would be a great felicity to feel that your spirit is changing into conformity to a nobler model, growing into the only right constitution and image to be retained for ever; to feel that the evil which infests it is shrinking and subdued under a mightier power; to regard the best and greatest Being as no longer an appalling object, thought of with reluctance, and a wish that you could be for ever out of his sight and reach; but now with emotions of love, and confidence, and hope, with an assurance of his mercy through Jesus Christ, with an experience of real communication with him concern-

ing all your interests, and with a consciousness that you are in activity for a Master who will confer an infinite reward. Think whether it would not be happy to feel habitually a power maintaining a sacred control over your passions and your will, and preserving the current of your life unmingled with the world's pollutions. Imagine yourself animated, at the close of each year or shorter period, with a fervent gratitude to God, in the consideration what sins and follies he has saved you from thus much longer. Can you doubt whether that one emotion would really be worth more, to an accountable being, than all the pleasurable feelings which an irreligious person can have enjoyed during the whole interval?

Place before your mind a scheme of life, in which you shall see yourself committing to the care and disposal of a beneficent Providence, the course of your life from the beginning, with a constant assurance that Sovereign Wisdom and Goodness will watch over all its movements and events, will conduct you through its perplexities and perils, will give you just so much temporal good that more would not be for your welfare, and will constrain all things which you are to pass through to co-operate to your ultimate happiness. Think also of enjoying the

consciousness that you are not throwing the inestimable spring season of your life away, but expending it so as to enrich every succeeding period, and to ensure a fine setting sun upon the last. Say honestly whether all this be not something better than any scheme of life which you have indulged your imagination in shaping. Or, if you sometimes surrender yourself to the fascinations of romance and poetry, glowing over bright pictures of felicity in which religion has no place, make the experiment on your mind, in an hour of cooler feeling, whether you dare pronounce that it would be well to forego this happiness of religion by a preference of that exhibited in these highly-colored fictions, on the supposition that they could, for you, be turned into reality. Yes, *if* these images could be turned into facts; but let me hint to you, that the very exhibitors of these delectable fabrications out of air would scorn your folly in expecting any such realization. They would tell you, deriding your simplicity, that the shows which enchant you so much are the creation *of their genius*, exerted to a much finer purpose than that of representing an actual or even possible order of things; that they consciously and intentionally abandon the ground on which plain mortality must toil along through ordinary

good and evil, to range among imaginary elements, obsequious to their will. Ludicrous and juvenile indeed, they would say, must be the credulity of any one setting out to find somewhere, as a fact, what it requires the utmost of their inventive power but to figure out in fiction. And you may perceive, if you have any sober observation, that no such felicity, wrought out of the mere materials of this world, is actually in the possession of any of its inhabitants—its *youthful* inhabitants I mean; for yourselves will readily allow, that those of them who are grown old, and are going to leave it, must have a hopeless task in striving to make it yield them happiness when it is shaking themselves off; shaking them off who have expended their life in idolizing it, and are clinging to it in the forlorn condition of feeling no hope or attraction toward a better.

CHAPTER IV.

You do not deserve to know how to be happy, even in this life, if you will not be persuaded to make an honest effort of comparison between

any scheme that would promise to make you so independently of religion, and the felicity which would attend a religious course commencing in youth.

Do not think to defend yourself by saying that the representation, how happy a youthful spirit might be in a devotement to religion, is greatly exaggerated. Besides that in theory it is evidently *in the nature* of that great cause, and in the gracious design and promise of Him from whom it descended, that it should confer advantages surpassing all others, you should be willing to receive testimony as to the fact from those who have gone effectually into the experiment. And you know that they whom you verily believe to have made the most competent trial, are the most decided, though not boastful, in their declarations; and that the tenor of their deportment proves their sincerity. Observe some of those young persons (I hope you are not so unfortunate as not to know such) whom you yourself believe to be most fully under the power of religion; call them, if you will, its prisoners, its bondmen, its slaves; some of your gay companions attempt to ridicule them as its fools; but do you observe whether their piety conduces to their happiness? It is true they are not happy after the manner in which your lighter

friends account of happiness; not happy, if the true signs of that state be a volatile spirit, a continual glitter of mirth, a dissipation of mind and time among trifles, a dread of reflection and solitude, an eager pursuit of amusements; in short, a prevailing thoughtlessness, the chief suspensions of which are for the study of matters of appearance and fashion, the servile care of faithfully imitating the habits and notions of a class, or perhaps the acquirement of accomplishments for show. It must be confessed they have thoughts too grave, the sense of too weighty an interest, a conscience too solicitous, and purposes too high to permit them any rivalry with the votaries of *such* felicity. Certainly they feel a dignity in their vocation which denies them the pleasure of being frivolous. But you will see them often cheerful, and sometimes very animated. And their animation is of a deeper tone than that of your sportive creatures; it may have less of animal briskness, but there is more *soul* in it. It is the action and fire of the greater passions directed to greater objects. Their emotions are more internal and cordial; they can be cherished and abide within the heart, with a prolonged, deep, vital glow; while those which spring in the youthful minds devoid of reflection and religion, seem to give no pleasure but

in being thrown off in volatile spirits at the surface. Did you think that these disciples of religion must renounce the love of pleasure? Look, then, at their policy for securing it. The most fortunate calculation for pleasure is to live *expressly for it; they* live primarily for duty, and pleasure comes as a certain consequence. If you have but a cold apprehension of the *degree* of such pleasure; if you can but faintly conceive how it should be poignant, you can at least understand that it must be *genuine*. And there is in it what may be called a principle of accumulation; it does not vanish in the enjoyment, but, while passing as a sentiment, remains as a reflection, and grows into a store of complacent consciousness, which the mind retains as a possession left by what has been possessed. To have *had* such pleasure *is* pleasure, and is so still the more, the more of it is past. Whereas you are aware, if you have been at all observant of the feelings betrayed by the youthful children of folly in the intervals of their delights, (and does nothing in your own experience obtrude the same testimony?) that those delights, when past, are wholly gone, leaving nothing to go into a calm *habitual* sense of being happy. The pleasure is a blaze which consumes entirely the material on which it is lighted. So that the uncal-

culating youth, who seized a transient pleasure last week, or yesterday, has no satisfaction from it to-day; but rather, perhaps, feels fretted with a sense of being cheated, and left in an irksome vacancy, from which he has no relief but in recovering his eagerness to pursue another, which is in the same manner to pass entirely away. And, observe, this is the description of the unenviable kind of felicity of the less criminal class of the young persons destitute of religion; it represents the condition of those who surrender their spirits and life to vain and trifling interests, as distinguished from the grosser evil which we denominate *vice*. To insist that religion is better than *that*, as productive of happiness in this life, would seem but an impertinent pleading in its favor.

Now be, for once, a thoughtful and serious being, willing to apprehend the contrast between all this and the state of a young person who feels a profound invariable conviction that he has made the right choice; who finds that his grand purpose will bear the severest exercise of his judgment, and pleases him the most when he judges the most rigorously; who feels an elation of spirit in vowing an eternal fidelity to his object; who beholds it undiminished in ex-

cellence, if there come a season of gloom over his other interests and prospects, when it proves to be not a thing of mere splendid colors which vanish in a deepening shade, but of intrinsic lustre, a luminary which shines the brighter for the darkness. Not that this youth makes any pretension to be a stoic philosopher, serenely independent of the temporal good and evil attending or awaiting his progress into life, with no warm affections to the things in the scene around him, to be painfully mortified when adverse events and influences frustrate his hopes and projects. But his advantage over those of his coevals who have no better than such interests, is, that he has enshrined his best affections in that one thing which does not partake of mortality and this world's uncertainty, and therefore but evinces its worthiness the more under the failure of every thing else that *can* fail. It is, like Him who is its Author and Guardian, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." The pious youth, then, is not abandoned, for his chief enjoyment, to an endless fluctuation, alternating between delight and disgust, eager to seize, and wondering that the possession turns so soon to nothing; all the while neglecting, or fearful to reflect, whether the whole plan be not essentially wrong; and thus fulfilling the decree, that "to

him that trusteth in vanity, vanity shall be the recompense."

Be assured there are young persons who can testify that this is their own experience of the happiness of religion in so considerable a degree as to inspire an earnest wish to become more completely possessed by its power, from the conviction that then they should be much happier still. And now do not let your mind evade the question whether they would not be right in the feeling that they would not for all the world be in the condition of those who never think of religion but as the enemy of youthful happiness. Some of them can well remember when they were themselves in that condition; and they would at any time prefer instant death to the calamity of relapsing into it. No wonder, then, if you perceive them holding extremely light the opinion of those, too many of their own age, who can look on them with a propensity to ridicule, or an affectation of pity.

And, tell me, what do *you* think of such judges? I conjecture you may have been under no small influence of the opinions of some rather like them, and would have deemed it a sad misfortune to be discountenanced in their community, or excluded from it by their aversion. But at what rate do you really estimate their

judgment? If they were to tell you, plainly, that it is needless and unseasonable in youth to consider deeply of the best use of life with reference to both its continuance and conclusion; to begin the expending of your time with a careful estimate of its value; to feel the importance of your immortal nature, and be solicitous for its welfare; to seek, as the highest good, the favor of the Almighty; in short, to begin well, that you may go on well and end well—if they were expressly to tell you so, as their opinion, what would you think their opinion worth? And should you not be ashamed of whatever it was in your mind that could give that opinion any weight with you? Think how it should be possible for you to feel, for a moment, any thing but contempt or pity for their very understanding. But if they did not tell you so, and could not deny that the contrary is true, what should you account of their conscience, their practical principle? Or, if they never reflected enough to have any opinion at all of the matter, what should you think of them altogether as authorities and examples?

Perhaps your plea would be, that they are, nevertheless, full of vivacity, pleasant and joyous; and that you must confess this captivates you so, that you have not thought of any such

grave affair as that of thus taking account of them. But, while you plead so, you know how flimsey is the consistence of this joyous mood of theirs, and by what means you could instantly break it up. It is like that thin slime of variegated hues which you sometimes see spread on the surface of polluted water, and which you can disperse into fragments by throwing in a twig or stone. When they are at the highest pitch of their spirits, and apparently "shut up in measureless content," you have but just to mention the doom we are all under to die; to name some young person of their acquaintance who lately died, perhaps in great distress and alarm for having been thoughtless like them; or to make an allusion to the final account,—"For all these things God will bring thee into judgment;"—you have but to do this, and you will quench, for the time, all their animation, and will see what awkward efforts they will have to make for its recovery. But, then, when you would plead, why should you not be allowed to have, free and unalloyed, the pleasure of your youth with and like so many of your age, and be innocently happy though without religion—does not your conscience smite you at the reflection that you are coveting the participation of a happiness which, in its liveliest hour, ten

words, or five, would suffice to dash; and those words no other than such as every young person should often hear, and with a serious thought of their import?

CHAPTER V.

There is but one topic more on which I will expostulate with you. Perhaps you will say that your neglect of religion is only *deferring* it; that you are sensible it is a concern which you *must* attend to some time, and that you are fully resolved to do so in maturer or advanced life. And are you saying this with the images before your mind of one, and another, and still another, within the circle of your knowledge, whom you have seen cut off in youth? Go, stand by their graves and repeat it there; for there is folly in it, if you could not on those spots repeat it with undisturbed assurance. Say, over those dead forms, now out of sight, but which you can so well, in memory, recall, such as you saw them, alert, and blooming, and smiling, say there deli-

berately that *you* know not why you should not be quite at your ease in delaying to some future distant time your application to that, without which you believe it to be a fearful thing to pass out of life. It is possible that some one of them, in approaching the last hour, expressed or conveyed to you an earnest admonition on this subject, conjuring you, in the name of a friend dying in youth, to beware of the guilt and hazard of delay. If so, go to the grave of that one especially, and there pronounce that an impertinence was uttered at a season when every sentence ought to be the voice of wisdom. Say, "I am wiser in this carelessness of my spirit than thou wast in the very solemnity of death." Why should you shrink at the idea of doing this? And if you dare not do it, what verdict are you admitting, by implication, as the just one to be pronounced on your conduct?

But perhaps you are ready to reply, that this is pushing the argument beyond its real strength; for that I seem to be assuming it as *probable* that your life will terminate in youth; whereas, judging from a collective account of the actual duration of lives, I must know this is *not* the probability. Just so, no doubt, in reference to themselves, thought they whom you have seen vanish in their early day. And a few examples, or even

one, of the treacherousness of the calculation, should suffice to warn you not to hazard any thing of great moment on so menacing an uncertainty. For, in all reason, when an infinitely important interest is depending, a mere possibility that your allotment may prove to be like theirs, is to be held of far greater weight on the one side, than the alledged probability of the contrary is on the other. The possibility of dying unprepared takes all the value from even the highest probability that there will be prolonged time to prepare; plainly because there is no proportion between the fearfulness of such a hazard and the precariousness of such a dependence. So that one day of the certain hazard may be safely asserted to be a greater thing *against* you, than whole imaginary years, promised you by the probability, ought to be accounted of value *for* you.

In minor concerns there may be purposes not improperly formed by a healthy young person, which, though he could effect them now, he may defer upon a calculation of protracted life; because the degree of probability that this life will be protracted may be equal to any degree of importance or urgency that there is in the design; so that he may be content to refer and trust it to that degree of probability, saying

thus—I reckon on accomplishing such a purpose, *if* my life be prolonged. Or, in other words, it is such a design that, in the event of his life *not* being so prolonged, it will be no serious misfortune not to have accomplished it at all. He may be content to hold, as thus dependent on the contingency of lengthened life, a purpose, for example, of visiting some foreign country, of seeking a more agreeable locality to reside in, of acquiring some particular branch of not absolutely indispensable knowledge; and so of many other things. The object may be of as much less than the highest necessity to him, as he possesses less than a certainty of long surviving his youth. But when you acknowledge a concern to be all-important, and that a failure in it would be immeasurably disastrous, and avow a purpose *not* to fail in it, and yet can deliberately consign this purpose for its accomplishment to a contingent futurity, confidently reckoning on years which you confess may never be yours, as an adequate provision for it in reserve, this is—indeed, my young friend, it is—the worst insanity, because a criminal one. When the concern is so momentous, and any hazard from delay so formidable, this supposed probability of your life being prolonged should not be taken as more worth than it *may prove* to be worth. And

what would it prove to be worth, in the event of your being, in this prime of your life, attacked suddenly by an illness threatening to be mortal?

Do not trifle with the matter so wretchedly and wickedly as to say, that, even in that event, perhaps you may have time allowed you for redeeming what you are now willfully losing, and for securing the safety of the great interest. Perhaps may! Why, this plainly means that you *may not.* But even if such an undeserved indulgence *should be* granted, and your perverse will be suddenly transformed to make the utmost use of it, are you not at this moment infallibly certain that it would be a cause of inexpressible grief to you to have made nothing of life, for its grand purpose, till on the point of breathing its last? Besides, that a consideration of what is the merely natural effect of the dread of death might justly throw a painful uncertainty on the genuineness of the principle which excited your solicitudes and efforts. Besides, too, that you are perfectly aware severe illness is a situation to the last degree unadapted to hard exercise of mind.

If you can give your attention for a while to such representations, and still feel that you dare consign your most momentous interest to take the chance, if I may express it so, of your having time for it long after the season of youth, and

can look undisturbed, undismayed, at the uncertainty where you shall be when the time so reckoned upon shall arrive, it seems almost in vain to reason with you any farther, except entreating you to turn one reflection on the state of that mind with which it *is* in vain to reason to such a purpose. Nevertheless, there are considerations which might be enforced upon you, even though you *could* have every degree of assurance, short of absolute certainty, that a time far off in prospect will be yours in this life—I am supposing all the while that you really do intend, or think you intend, to apply yourself in earnest to the supreme concern at a more advanced period of your days.

It has been already enough insisted on, that religion would make you far happier than any thing you can enjoy in the neglect of it, during youth itself, considered as one distinct stage; but I would now speak of it as connected with the whole of life, allowing you to assume, if you will, that your life is to reach the full term of the age of man.

You say this protracted life must and shall eventually be religious, confessing that otherwise all would be wrong. What do you mean by its being religious? If you have any just conception of the nature of religion, while you

are resolving that your life shall *some time* assume that character, you are resolving it shall then be *service to God.* But now, what claims can there be that he will have on any later portion of your life, but has not on this earlier? Answer your conscience *why* it should be a duty to serve him then, if it be no duty now. What is to bring you under an obligation from which you are now exempt? Is it that you will then be more dependent on him, or subsist more entirely on his bounty, or be more immediately and constantly in his presence? Or is it that you will have more vigor and liberty for his service; that you will have less to do with the cares and grievances of the world? Or is it that he has, in the communications of his will, less expressly required the services of youth than of more advanced age; giving, by implication, a license to youthful spirits to forget him, and to take favors most largely at his hands, on an understanding that there is to be no present return? No; you readily say that all this is absurdity. You do not deny that there extends over your whole life one grand obligation of service to God; only, you have your own purposes to serve, and he must wait! He has given you, for cultivation, a small tract of life, of time, on which you might raise pre-

cious things for offerings to him: when you have exhausted its best faculties of production to gratify yourself, you will resign to *him* what it may be made to yield when reduced to the condition of sterility and weeds. But supposing you *should* become truly religious in the latter part of life, you can even now understand that the very emphasis and intensity of the convictions of that new state of mind will be to feel how absolute was the duty, and how sublime would have been the happiness, of devoting every stage of life to the service of God. What, then, will be the reflections with which conscience will sting you, for having expended the most animated part of it on the principle that what would be gained to him, would be lost to you?

Again, when you are making to yourself these promises, that you certainly will some time, in a yet distant part of life, apply yourself seriously to religion, you must mean that you will make it an earnest concern that your spirit, by that time advanced far toward the conclusion of its sojourn on earth, may attain a prepared state for removing to a superior and permanent scene of existence. This *is* what you mean, is it not? But then how can it be that you are not struck with a sense of something flagrantly absurd, in a plan of excluding from all but the latter por-

tion of life, an affair standing related to so mighty a consequence? Think of that existence during endless ages, an existence to commence in a condition determined for happiness or misery by the state of mind which shall have been formed in this introductory period. And is this the single case in which all rules of *proportion* may, without absurdity, and with impunity, be set aside? You intend, I will suppose, to apply as much as a few years, somewhere yonder in the decline of life, to this great business of preparation; that is to say, as much of the time within those years as will not be inevitably consumed by worldly cares and attention to your infirmities. That is the measure of time to be placed over against the immense futurity! Behold those two, presented in such a relation. Look at that ocean, and at the competency of the time to prepare a vessel for launching upon it. Set the poor fragments of weeks and months in the years so appropriated in your determination, set them in your view, against the ensuing millions of years or ages. Have you no perception of a frightful disproportion?

If you attempt an evasion by saying, But what would be the *whole* of this short life employed in preparation, as set against that futurity?—the answer is, that the term of life, dimi-

nutive as it is for a preparatory introduction to that stupendous sequel, is what our Creator has allotted to us, leaving to us no responsibility that it is not longer, and is therefore a space of time which his blessing can render competent to the great purpose; but you are presuming to take a different and exceedingly diminished measure on your own responsibility; apportioning off, as an adequate space for the preparation, a small section only of what he has assigned for it. This is, in effect, telling him that a far shorter time than the short one which he has allotted for the purpose, will be quite enough for it; and demanding of him that his blessing shall be conferred on this arbitrary unsanctioned adjustment of your own, so as to *make* a shorter time suffice for the object than that which he has appointed and required to be devoted to its accomplishment. But turn your thoughts upon your conduct, to reflect what an act of reason you are performing when you say, The whole of the time which God has assigned for a preparation to enter happily on an eternal existence is very short, and *therefore* a much shorter is sufficient!

And reflect what an estimate you are entertaining of both the nature and importance of that preparation, while you can in ease or gayety see one month and year after another passing

away, and anticipate that many more will pass, without contributing to it one particle. Whatever truth there may be to be learned, whatever discipline to be applied, whatever habits to be formed, whatever communications with heaven to be opened and maintained, and whatever may be lost, and whatever guilt may be incurred by neglecting all this, still this year, and many more yet to come, can well be spared from the concern, and surrendered wholly to any other demands. You can account with yourself that it is so much, and so much more, gained to your temporary interests, and lost *only* to the process for raising you to the eternal ones. At the end of one of these periods you have to reflect,—A year of the prime and vigor of my life has passed in a lively career, and is gone to be mine no more; it might have effected for me, and left me possessing, something of inestimable value toward what I own to be the supremely important business of my life; but it has left me nothing. When I shall be constrained, at length, to apply myself to that business with all my might, I shall have to remember this year, with the consciousness that there is not with me one advantage derived from it in aid of my new and difficult undertaking; that, as relative to *that* concern, it was, by my own determination, flung with all

its rich possibilities out of my existence; that I shall have no benefit from it to all eternity. You will have to reflect—I decided that the latter part of my life was all that I would give to the great affair; I have accomplished my determination by alienating from it the finest portion of my life; I advance to old age, to death, to judgment, to eternity, under the voluntary loss; and whether, with the impoverished resources of this late remainder of my time, I shall succeed or fail in the grand work, I shall for ever have to remember that I have not thought it worth appropriating to it my most valuable years.

So you will have to reflect. But now is the time which you are actually doing that on which you will have so to reflect; you are deliberately and daily adding something toward your being placed in that predicament. It is pressed upon you as the plainest truth in the world, that you ought to be, through the largest possible extent of your allotted time on earth, in a state adapted to an endless life; and you resolve, and act on your resolution, *not* to be in that state during many years of this introduction. You lay a resolute hand on this invaluable portion, to withhold and defend it against the claims of that sovereign interest, practically pronouncing it

better that the commencing and animated stage of your existence should be alienated from all advantageous connection with the grand whole; that it should *not* conduce to final good; that it should be for ever lost as to all that is to follow. Let it be enough, you seem to say, that the endless life to which I am appointed and advancing, shall have, as I do intend, a small part of this introductory one yielded to a conformity with the solemnity of its character applied to secure its happiness; and if its importance would insist on more, I will resist the encroachment. No authority of its requirement shall wrest from me the liberty of casting as much as I please of this precious part of my time into an abyss, never to emerge in wealth or pleasure to me in futurity. And whatever that futurity of existence may be the poorer or the worse for so much lost to it, I am content to stand in my lot. My choice is rather to feel how much has been lost to my welfare then, than to forego the pleasure of following my inclinations now.

And yet, at this very time, at any time, you will acknowledge that the interest of that futurity is the transcendent one, that it is vast and eternal, that it is critically depending, and that it is *your own*. O what trivial things are the

most lofty and solemn words, or their import either, to a mind that will not reflect, or cannot feel!

CHAPTER VI.

If, nevertheless, you are still positive in the resolution that you will devote your attention to religion at a more advanced period, I would re-represent to you, that what you are meanwhile losing is not merely so much *time*. You deem there is a peculiar value and charm in this prime of your life, so that you rejoice that you are not old nor middle-aged. You do so even independently of any direct thought of being so much further off from the latter end. And what is this so valued peculiarity of youth? Doubtless it is the plenitude of life, the vigor and elasticity of body and mind, the quickness of apprehension, the liveliness of emotion, the energy of impulse to experiment and daring. Now, consider under what signal advantage, with respect to the subsequent progress, religion would commence its course in the strength of these animated forces.

It would be like taking a steed of fire for some noble enterprise, instead of one already tamed with time and labor, or nearly worn down. You would thus be borne onward a great length before the vigor of nature begins to remit, and would have acquired a principle of impulsion to advance after that peculiar vigor should have ceased. Your youth, at leaving you, would seem to send its spirit forward with you. The religious career thus commencing, would have all the advantage which a stream of vast length of course acquires from rising and running its first stage on the slope of a lofty mountain, as compared with that which is put in motion on a tract little better than flat, and creeps heavily on for want of such an impulse from its origin. So important is it to the progress of religion, that it should have the utmost benefit from its rise.

Again, consider that a person prosecuting, in advanced life, a course which he deeply approves, has a peculiar pleasure in recollecting it as having been also the favorite interest of his youth; a pleasure additional to that of knowing that his early life was not thrown away. For, all the pleasing associations of that season adhere and impart their charm to that which continues the approved favorite still. There is the

memory of departed friends, the coeval or elder associates and promoters of his youthful piety, his allies in the best cause, whose images in some solitary hour seem to smile on him from the past, or from heaven. The remembered conscientious efforts and vows of self-dedication augment his satisfaction in that which he still feels deserved them so well. The animated emotions, which he may sometimes regret that he cannot now revive in their vernal freshness, are still *his*, as having been given to *that which is still his*, to that which has been continuously his grand object. Thus, what is now ripening into fruit, he can delight to recollect in the beauty and fragrance of its blossom. What a difference between this and the feelings of a man, who, becoming religious in later life, finds himself by that very cause dissevered, as it were, from his youth, except for painful, self-reproachful reflection; who feels that its associations, instead of conveying a genial warmth to him along an uninterrupted train of piety to the present time, are gone away in connection with what he regards as the dishonor and calamity of his existence; like the gardens that once were on a tract which a man has lost from his estate by subsidence into the sea.

But still farther: while you are resolving to

adopt the right plan some time, and flattering yourself that thus there will have been, on the whole, and in the conclusion of life's account, a safe preponderance in favor of religion; you are to be admonished that the absence of it in the earlier part of life is something more, and worse, than simply *so much lost* to that account. It is not only that you are not religious during the time that you shall postpone that concern—not only that you are rendering so much of life, with respect to that, a mere blank—you are all the while aggravating the difficulty, and lessening the probability, of your being religious at a later period, or ever. Are you so thoughtless or unknowing as to fancy that a long course of estrangement from this interest, of aversion to it, of resistance against its claims, of suppression of the remonstrances of conscience in its behalf, is to leave you in a kind of neutral state, impartial to admit at length the conviction that now it *is* high time, and easily convertible into a christian spirit? Consider that all this time you are forming the habits, which, when inveterately established, will either be invincibly upon you through life, or require a mighty wrench to emancipate you. This refusal to think, this revolting from any attempt at self-examination, this averting of your attention from serious

books, this declining to seek the divine favor and assistance by prayer, this projecting of schemes bearing no regard to that favor, and which are not to need that assistance, this eagerness to seize each transitory pleasure, this preference of companions who would like you the worse if they thought you feared God or cared for your eternal welfare; these dispositions, prolonged in a succession of your willing acquiescences in them, will grow into a settled constitution of your soul, which will thus become its own inexorable tyrant. The habit so forming will draw into it all the affections, the workings of imagination, and the train of thought; will so possess itself of them, that in *it* alone they will live, and move, and have their being. It will have a strong, unremitting propensity to grow *entire*, so as to leave nothing unpreoccupied in the mind for any opposing agent to take hold on, in order to counteract it, as if it were instinctively apprehensive of the effect of protests from conscience, or visitings from the powers of heaven, or intimations from the realm of death; and therefore intent on forming the sentiments of the soul to such a consistence and coalition as shall leave none of them free to desert at the voice of these summoners.

And if you would reflect, you would be sensi

ble that, in effect, you *wish* the case to be just so. Do not practice any dissimulation with yourself on the subject. In making the resolution that *some time*—(and now, honestly, is not that a time willingly regarded as far off?)—that some time you will apply yourself to religion, you plainly intend that you will *not* be religious, that you will be estranged from religion till then. But, in resolving that it shall not command you, you necessarily must wish that neither shall it disturb you. You wish that, during all the time, no interfering, opposing, alarming principle may abide in your mind, because you desire to enjoy fully, and in peace, the kind of happiness which you are to exclude religion in order to enjoy. You are wishing, then, in effect, that your affections and tastes may be entirely in harmony with a system of life devoid of religion, that your judgment may accommodate itself not to condemn your proceeding, and that your conscience should either be beguiled to acquiesce or repose in a long, deep sleep. That is to say, while you are resolving that at some advanced period you will be religious, you are also resolved, that, during the long preceding time, you will yield yourself to a process for consolidating those very habits which will fix your mind in a confirmed antipathy to religion. You are intend-

ing to enter at last on consecrated ground, and yet are surrendering yourself to a power which will hold you back with the grasp of a fiend when you attempt to approach its border. You presume that the latter stage of your journey shall be an ascent to heaven; and yet, in this earlier one, you deliberately choose a track in which you can calculate how each downward step goes in aggravation of the arduousness of that ascent, if you shall indeed ever attempt it; as if a man who had to reach the summit of a vast mountain, and might do it on one side by a long, gradual, and comparatively gentle declivity, should prefer essaying it on that other side, where, descending first to a great depth to reach its base, he must then climb its precipices. Whatever I am now gaining, he might say to himself, in the way of pleasant indulgence, in this descent, is so much that I shall find to have been *gained against* me by the difficulty on yonder steep.

CHAPTER VII.

It may be easy for you to have credit with yourself in denying, in a light inconsiderate way, that you are actually adopting a plan of such monstrous absurdity. You will say, that you are far from being conscious of any wish to aggravate the future difficulty of applying your mind in good earnest to religion. But this is an evasion of the thoughtlessness or disingenuousness of which you ought to be more than ashamed. You are bound to consider, that in adopting a plan, you are accountable for every thing which is *necessarily* involved in it. And when your plan is that of spending an indefinite but large portion of your life exempt from religion, you necessarily wish to have the unalloyed benefit of your privilege. (But what terms I am using!) That clear advantage you cannot have, if invaded by convictions, if harrassed by conscience, if kept in awe of the invisible Observer, if lightened upon by intimations of a judgment to come. You necessarily wish an immunity from all this in the prosecution of your scheme. But, therefore, by implication, you wish

for that which alone can so exempt you; and that is no other than such a hardened state of mind, such an oblivion habitually, and such a power of defiance occasionally, as will constitute, when fully confirmed, a most fatal aversion and unadaptedness to that transfer of your thoughts and affections to religion, on which you are presuming as the ultimate resource.

And it is probable, that if you had self-observation enough, you might perceive this process toward a confirmed state is going on. Have you no consciousness that the last two or three years of your neglect of religion have rendered your disinclination to it more positive? May there not be a more sensible reaction against its remonstrances? If the earlier feeling was that of mere carelessness about the subject, has it in no degree changed to the stronger one of aversion? Perhaps a serious book, which would at a former time have been lightly put aside, as what no way concerned you, would now be regarded with a pointed sentiment of dislike, almost of hostility, as against an ungracious intruder, come, like the ancient prophet to the impious king, "to speak no good of you, but evil." Perhaps you find that you can more promptly set aside any scruples of conscience that rise to obstruct you in the way of your inclinations. And, perhaps, as a re-

ward—an advantage do you deem it?—of this boldness, you are now seldomer incommoded by such scruples. So that, though your feelings clash more unequivocally with the dictates of religion when it does arrest your attention, you are stronger to resist, and more expert to elude, and suffer on the whole less of the trouble of its interference.

This is quite the natural course; but you ought to be *aware* of its progress. If you absolutely will proceed on this plan of retaining a purpose in favor of religion, but deferring it to some future distant time, I wish you would be induced to keep yourself apprized of its effect in you, by making now and then an experiment, in the way of test, on the temper of your mind. Will you be advised to take occasionally some very serious and cogent book on the subject of personal religion, or some peculiarly solemn part of the Bible; to read it a little while, and watch in what manner your inmost feeling responds to it? Do this again after an interval, and observe whether the displacency, the repugnance of your heart be less—whether it be not sensibly more. In an hour when you are left alone, with a perfect freedom to remain for a while in this retirement, recollect the duty of approaching your heavenly Father, with thanks,

confessions, and supplications; and observe the movement of your soul under this thought in this opportune hour. Do the same in subsequent opportunities, and see whether the indisposition be not increased rather than diminished. And if the fact be so, what a melancholy phenomenon! a little, dependent spirit voluntarily receding from its beneficent Creator; directing its progress away from the eternal source of light, and life, and joy; and that on a vain presumption of being under the comet's law of returning at last to the sun! In a similar manner, at successive intervals, try the effect on the temperament of your mind, of some remembered example of eminent piety in youth, of the recollection of former youthful associates dead, or of the solemn idea of your own death, and your continual approximation toward it; and see whether, under these applications, there will not be betrayed, in the habit of your feelings, an increasing alienation from religion. And yet you are the person to indulge an easy confidence, that, after you shall have gone on many years thus confirming the estrangement and aversion from it, you shall easily turn to it as your best friend!

Might it not be well to enforce it on yourself as a rule, that this your resolution to be religious

some time shall be distinctly recalled to mind in each successive instance of your doing what tends to its frustration? When you find yourself making an effort to banish the shade of pensive feeling, or grave reflection, which any circumstance of the time may have had power to throw over you, say to yourself, It is I, nevertheless, that am to be religious, and therefore to cherish such thoughts and emotions in a season yet to come. If you perceive yourself carefully avoiding "the house of mourning," even though it be your friends that are visited there with sickness or death, say again, I am one day, however, to entertain and welcome that religion which would be there, at this time, enforced on me with such powerful admonition. When you are entering a gay, thoughtless party, to mingle in such hilarity as any visitings of religious reflection would quell, say to yourself, That very thing which would freeze this animation of theirs and mine, shall, after a while, be the grand solace of my heart; and this is the way I am taking to prepare myself for its being so! If you go so far as to endure voluntarily, and without repugnance, society where serious subjects and pious men are turned to jest, and the most awful names taken in vain, say, I am training myself here, through familiarity with irreligion, to give

my utmost reverence and affection to that of which I am thus abetting the scorn and profanation! If you are projecting a scheme for the occupation and satisfaction of a considerable portion of your life, but cast upon a principle and plan evidently unfavorable to your spiritual welfare, reflect on it, and say again, There is *another* scheme to be afterwards undertaken, into which I shall pass with all the advantage of having wholly excluded the care of it from this prior one; when my lighter juvenile unconcern about religion shall have settled into an utter estrangement, as a part of the habit confirmed through my long and complete engrossment by a worldly project, then I shall need but one touch of conviction, but one recollection of my former vow, but one act of my will, to throw my spirit free, and become religious enough for death and for heaven!

I repeat to you, that by this course of procrastination, this scheme of reversionary piety, you are not simply losing so much, with regard to the greatest affair, but are also taking strong security against yourself that you shall not save the remainder. The worthless or noxious growth which you suffer to overspread the first large division of your allotted tract of time, is continually extending its roots far forward, and will

scatter its seeds thickly over all the space beyond. Consider how well, even at your age, you are informed of it as a truth, that whatever entwines itself with the youthful feelings maintains a strange tenacity, and seems to insinuate into the vitality of the being. How important to watch, lest what is thus combining with its life, should contain a principle of moral death! Consider, that in this earlier period you are peculiarly disposed to entertain social partialities, are perhaps giving yourself to companionship and friendships, or contracting more intimate relations, which must have an important influence on the growing formation of your mind into its decided character, and on the consequent tenor of your life. Now when this social attraction combines several parties destitute of religion, they are in effect giving mutual pledges never to be religious; since they are giving and receiving the whole influence of their friendship to fix their minds in that state in which they are at present pleased with one another; that is to say, in a state of aversion to religion. And supposing that each of them were, nevertheless, like you, intending to be religious some time, we cannot well conceive any fairer occasion for the scoff of a malignant spirit, than to see them thus all in a league to frustrate what each of them believes he intends.

CHAPTER VIII.

This same intention, you have no reason to doubt, has been entertained in earlier years, by many whom you now see advanced to the middle or decline of life, without having done any thing toward its accomplishment. Yet they were, in their time, as confident as you are now. Should not this alarm you? Some of them may have yielded up the design, not by an express act of renouncement, but insensibly, in the gradual hardening of their consciences, their complete immersion in the world, and assimilation to its spirit; with the addition, in too many cases, of the practice of some more positive kind of sin. Many of them, however, are perhaps still retaining the purpose, inert and buried under an accumulation of repressive habits; like a seed artificially kept torpid in order that it may be quickened into germination at a preferable time. The consciousness that they are mortal, and must be forced at last out of all that now occupies and pleases them, is soothed to repose in this presumption, that they shall bring a reserved expedient into action before the neglect

of it be fatal. But answer honestly, do you think it probable that they will? Do you expect, if you should live to see them forward a few years further—do you *expect* to see them withdrawing their engrossed affections, breaking asunder their inveterate habits, and doing a great thing which they have systematically and willfully prepared themselves not to do; that is, devoting themselves to God and the care of their salvation? Perhaps you have allowed yourselves to imagine that *you*, after having made a considerable progress in years, shall become, at every advance, proportionally more and more sensible of the shortening of life, and shall necessarily behold nearer the visage of death, presented through a clearer medium, and with enlarging and more defined features. How can it, you may have said, be otherwise, in the exercise of mere common sense, than that this approach toward the end should aggravate upon me the cogency of my grand duty? Do then look again at the multitude of examples around you, and see what avails them this obvious arithmetic of time. You see persons with whose names you and your companions, with a tacit pleasure of contrast in your favor, couple the epithet "old," still as heedlessly and confidently as yourselves, reckoning on time enough yet, to

continue deferring the grand business without peril of its being left undone. If their youthful "trust in their own heart," that they would ultimately apply themselves to the indispensable business, fixed that determination on or about some given point or period in their future life, they can pass, or perhaps have passed that period, with the same facility of neglect as any former one, finding nothing to stop them there with the peremptory exaction to perform their vow. The lying spirit which had promised to meet them at the assigned spot, to conduct them thenceforward toward heaven, appears not on the ground when they arrive there, unless to tell them that another stage, still farther on, will be more advantageous for commencing the enterprise. You look at the marks of time on their countenances, recollect them perhaps as in mature or middle age when you were in infancy, and wonder they can yield themselves to such an imposition; and all this without a single reflection that you are putting yourself into the train of the same delusion. How can they act so, you say, when I feel so certain of the justness of *my* determination to act otherwise on the strength of my conviction of the ultimate necessity of religion? Be you assured there is no more fatal betrayer than a right and excellent principle adopt-

ed, but consigned to future time and more favorable inclination for being carried into action. The consciousness that you are certainly keeping a good resolution, only deferred to wait a "more convenient season," will help you to indulge a fallacious security, while every season for accomplishing it is passing away. Through one period of your time after another, it will appear to you infallibly efficacious for the next; and no period will come as that from which you cannot look forward to still another. And this your purpose, suspended as it were in advance over your course, as a malign imitation, by infernal art, of the star which the sages followed to find the Savior of the world, will probably lead you on, still confiding that it must stand arrested at the spot where you shall accept the grace of that Redeemer, till you are drawn to a precipice, where your deluder will vanish and you will fall.

All the latter course of this pleading has proceeded on the supposition that you *may* have a protracted life. It has been an attempt to represent to you that even if you *might* be allowed to assume a very strong probability, little short of certainty, of reaching the full term of human life —nay, that if you were certain you shall, your scheme of exempting its earlier portion from reli-

gion, on a promise to yourself and to God, of taking that for your chief concern at a more advanced stage, would still be absurd, and wicked, and most dangerous. But I warn you again, do not so criminally trifle with your own reason as to pretend on any such calculation, in sight and in contempt of the thousand instances of your fellow-mortals dying in youth, and in the immediately following stage.

Will you absolutely refuse now seriously to examine the claims of religion? How can you have lived so long without feeling that so much at least is what a rational accountable being ought to do? Do it now! What should prevent you? You have in that spirit the power to think at this very time. You *can* fix it intently on the subject that you shall choose. Now is an interval which can be exempted from the indispensable demands of business; and, if you will it so, from the allurements of pleasure. You may, you can, this hour recollect whether there be a subject of transcendent importance which you have never duly considered yet; and you may choose it, instead of another subject, for present consideration. You cannot help seeing what that subject is. It is religion that stands before you, with oracles, lights, and an exhibition of the most grand and awful images. It is that which represents to you the

real truth of the state of your soul toward God, the concern of your eternal interests, the relation you stand in to another world, the peremptory requirement of what you must do to be saved. What can ever, through endless duration, be worth your considering, if this be not? You know that religion, unless it be a fable, *has* all this importance, that it has this importance to *you*, and that it has it to you *now*, while this day, this hour, is passing. In a matter of incomparably less magnitude, (say it were a most critical hazard, threatening you at the point where your temporal prosperity mainly depended, and might be ruined for life,) you would feel that the concern pressed importunately and justly on the thoughts and cares of the present instant. If any one advised you to take no trouble of vigilance or exertion about it, to occupy yourself entirely with other matters and indifferently await the event, you would spurn the suggestion as equally unfeeling and absurd. What! you would say, when the whole question of safety or utter ruin may be depending on the judgment and activity which I may exercise this day? But here is the supreme interest of your existence. It cannot be safe, you will confess it cannot, if you will give it no serious attention. But then you are confessing that you have left it till now in peril,

and that it is so at this very hour—nay, in greater peril than ever before, as aggravated by the guilt of such wilful neglect, and by the diminution of the term allotted for the attainment of a happy security. And can you repel from you, can you resolutely set yourself to force off its urgent application for your immediate attention? Look at the action of your mind. Is it really, even now, in the very effort of an impulse to drive this subject away, and are you giving your whole will to make this impulse successful? And do you feel that you are prevailing? And is it impossible for you to reflect, at this moment, *what it is* that you are successfully doing? Cannot you perceive, have you no suspicion, what dreadful principle it is that is giving you this power and this success? Can you let it perform such a work, and not resolve to inspect its nature? Look at it, observe its fatal operation just now going on; and then say, honestly, whether any thing can be of a quality more execrable? Do not say this is extravagant language; do not stay to mind the language at all; but fix your attention on the thing itself. Words are wind, but there is a reality there in operation at this moment in your mind. It *is* actually there—the fearful principle, which is actuating your feelings and your will to force away from your spi

rit the thoughts, and all the benefit of thinking, of your highest duty and interest, of your eternal salvation. If it could be suddenly revealed to you in full light, what an operation this is which you are even now suffering there in your heart, no awful catastrophe in nature, no tempest nor shock of an earthquake, would affright you so much.

After an interval we would ask you, And is it now done? Has the repelling principle, after so many former successes, prevailed once now; so that the great subject which approached you, appealed to you, solicited you, displayed smiles of divine benignity, alternating with just menaces and frowns on your obstinacy, has been driven off, and is vanishing like the images of a disturbing dream when one awakes! Are you now quite at your ease again, to go free into your business, conviviality, or amusements? Then, what have you accomplished, but to send an angel of mercy away, and to vanquish any last power that remained in an almost expiring conscience? What have you gained, but to have your soul still more securely grasped by that which withholds it from God, and a confirmed power and facility of rejecting that which speaks in his name, if it should obtrude on you again? In what new principle do you walk forth, but

that of having less remaining time, and augmented disinclination, for that one thing of which the failure is perdition?

Now, will you, my young friend, lay such considerations to heart; or will you rather have it to remember, perhaps when all too late, that they were pressed upon you in vain?

THE END.

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